

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: DeSmet

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing:

Glacier National Park Multiple Property Listing Amended (2016)

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: Lake McDonald

City or town: West Glacier State: MT County: Flathead

Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☒

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this x nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property x meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national x statewide x local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

x A B x C D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒
- Public – Local ☐
- Public – State ☐
- Public – Federal ☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☐
- District ☐
- Site ☐
- Structure ☒
- Object ☐

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> 1 </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u> 1 </u>	<u> </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Recreation and Culture: Outdoor Recreation

Transportation: Water-related

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Recreation and Culture: Outdoor Recreation

Transportation: Water-related

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Other: Carvel-planked wooden vessel

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: : Hull: WOOD
Keel/stem: WOOD
Roof: CLOTH/Canvas
Stem-band/Guard: METAL-Steel
Windows: GLASS, METAL-Aluminum
Hand-rail: METAL, WOOD

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Operating in Glacier National Park on Lake McDonald on the west side of the continental divide, since its construction in 1930, the 56-foot long by 13-foot wide carvel planked cedar on oak frame vessel *DeSmet* took its name from Pierre-Jean DeSmet, an influential Jesuit missionary throughout western North America during the mid-nineteenth century. The vessel *DeSmet* was commissioned and owned by the Glacier Park Transport Company as a scenic launch from its Lewis Hotel, now known as the Lake McDonald Lodge. It has never left the park, continuing to operate for scenic cruises every summer and spending winters dry-docked in the historic Fish Creek Bay Boathouse.¹

¹ The boathouse is listed as part of the Glacier National Park MPS. Assigned Smithsonian number 24FH0891, the boathouse was listed April 4, 1996 (NR # 95001567).

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Narrative Description

The *DeSmet* is owned and operated by Glacier Park Boat Company and provides scenic boat cruises from the dock at the historic Lake McDonald Lodge on Lake McDonald in Glacier National Park. Lake McDonald is the largest and deepest lake in the park at ten miles long and 472 feet deep. The lake sits on the west side of the continental divide at an elevation of 3153 feet and receives snow and glacial run-off from the surrounding mountains.

DeSmet is a United States Coast Guard-registered (USCG) traditional carvel planked cedar on oak frame vessel constructed in 1930.² USCG-rated to carry 70 passengers, one master and one deckhand, the boat measures 57 feet long with a beam of 11 feet. It is registered at 18 gross tons and 15 net tons. The seams are primed with linseed oil and caulked with cotton under a layer of Sika-flex seam compound.³ The raked stem and keel are built of fir and the stem band is steel.

The planks of the hull run perpendicular to the frames in a single layer. Each plank varies in length and is roughly 1 ¼-inches thick. The top row of planks are capped by a laminated fir guard that extends out past the hull sides by 3 inches and runs the length of both port and starboard sides. The guard has an exterior band of steel that acts as a rub rail when the boat is moored. The guard is attached to the top ends of the frames and connected to the covering board built of fir and running both sides of the boat and across the bow and stern.

There are four levels of decks on the *DeSmet*: the lower deck with both interior and covered exterior seating, the main deck with the wheelhouse, a bow deck with bench seating and the upper deck, or roof with handrails and exterior bench seating. Passengers enter the boat on the main deck through a gate in the handrail adjacent the wheelhouse. The wheel house exterior is frame and panel construction with two forward windows that slide down to open. The interior of the wheelhouse can be accessed by a sliding companionway door on both starboard and port sides. The helm consists of the original oak wheel that connects to the steering cable running down into the bilge and aft to the tiller and rudder. The small dash includes the Perkins gauge cluster, a fuel shut-off, and a compass. The aft wall of the wheelhouse interior rises four feet from the deck and then a deep ledge continues back to the aft wheelhouse windows. On the shelf ledge is an electronics cluster that controls the PA System, bilge pumps, lights, and a small video screen connected to cameras inside the main cabin and on the upper deck.

² Traditional carvel planking denotes planks butted edge to edge with a small gap left above and below each plank filled with cotton and covered with caulking. The planks in a carvel style boat swell once submerged, tightening the seams. All planks are individually shaped to follow the curvature of the hull. Part of this shaping is planing a curve on the interior and exterior of the plank so that it fits the curvature of the frames and the lines of the boat giving the exterior of the hull a smooth appearance. Oak frames are bent to shape by steaming in a steam box until pliable then quickly clamped into place before cooling down and drying out; a good source for the definition/description of carvel planking is: Howard I. Chapelle, *Boatbuilding: A Complete Handbook of Wooden Boat Construction*, W.W. Norton and Co.: New York, 1969.

³ Historically, material used for caulking included cement and tar; more recently, pliable synthetics, like SikaFlex are used, especially for boats that spend much of the year out of the water. As the planks dry and shrink, the seam compound is pliable enough so as not to fail.

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The main deck wraps around the forward three sides of the wheelhouse leading to the lower, bow, upper deck, and lower deck cabin space. The bow deck is accessed by two stairs from the main deck forward of the wheelhouse. Varnished planked benches run along both starboard and port sides of the bow deck space. The covering board is visible along both sides and is painted with a turquoise blue urethane paint.

The interior lower deck is accessed through a three-door companionway on the port side of the wheelhouse. A three-step ladder leads down to the interior cabin space of the lower deck. Along each side of the cabin are ten oak, tongue-and-groove benches, and there is a wooden bench with life-jacket storage down the center of the space. Another, smaller bench with lifejacket storage sits against the forward bulkhead. The ceiling along each side under the window frames curves up from the sole with 3-inch tongue-and-groove; the vertical face between each seat bench is panel and frame construction with a pine panel held in grooved horizontal rails and vertical stiles. The windows are oak and glass and slide down behind the ceiling wall next to the seats. The sole is tongue-and-groove with removable hatches down the center for access to the bilge. At the aft end of the interior lower deck is a single, walk through companionway door to the exterior lower deck area.

Plywood bench seating wraps around three sides of the exterior lower deck, and the upper deck extends overhead on two fir supports. The ceiling above the exterior lower deck is the same tongue-and-groove as found inside the main cabin. A flag pole extends off the transom covering board aft of the bench seating along with two larger cleats used for the stern line and towing.

On the starboard side of the forward bulkhead inside the interior lower deck cabin is a single door companionway leading into the engine room. The Perkins 4-cylinder 4-236 diesel engine connects to a shaft that runs through the bilge and out the keel spinning the four-bladed bronze propeller. The engine, installed in 1979, replaced a gasoline powered engine.⁴ Additional equipment in the engine room includes fire and bilge pumps, batteries, electrical lines, and access to the forward bilge space.

The upper deck, accessed via a three-stair ladder on the starboard side of the wheel house, allows for a maximum of 6 passengers at a time to sit or stand on top of the boat. The handrails are built of steel and topped with a varnished fir rail. Originally, 12 passengers were allowed on the upper deck and a more robust two-sided bench sat along the center, but as U.S. Coast Guard regulations related to the average weight of a passenger increased, recent stability testing forced a reduction in upper deck capacity. The larger benches were replaced with smaller ones that can only accommodate 6 passengers at a time.

Integrity

The *DeSmet* retains excellent integrity. The case for integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association are virtually inseparably entwined and remain exceptionally strong. The boat continues to ply the same waters and serves in the same capacity within Glacier National Park that it did historically. The awe-inspiring landscape remains virtually unchanged allowing

⁴ All original gasoline engines have been replaced by higher efficiency diesel engines to comply with NPS contractual standards.

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visitors to experience a nearly identical experience, feeling the same emotions, as when the boat was first constructed and used. The boat reflects its historic origins, presenting nearly identically as it did when constructed.

Despite years of service in the lakes of Glacier National Park integrity of materials remains strong. Although some materials have been replaced during the *DeSmet*'s history of plying the waters of Lake McDonald, this occurred to allow the boat to continue functioning in its original historic capacity.⁵ The *DeSmet* still maintains a large amount of original materials in both the hull and superstructure. Maintenance includes the installation of new steam bent oak frames, when necessary, to either replace or "sister" to those too deteriorated to serve inside the hull, and new fir has replaced heavily deteriorated areas of the original fir stem and keel. Areas of the hull require new cedar planks on a regular basis due to the persistence of rot associated with annual swelling and drying of the wood planks. All new planks are of locally sourced cedar and follow the same lines as the original layout. As old planks are replaced, the original galvanized fasteners are replaced with modern silica bronze fasteners that prevent wood deterioration and rot. The previous gasoline engine was replaced with the present, more efficient and safer, diesel engine, installed in 1979.

Integrity of design and workmanship remain very strong. Repairs have mostly followed traditional methods and the historic design has not changed, clearly presenting a nearly identical appearance as when first constructed. Because repairs and restoration work observed the original design and material elements and were renewed in-kind following the same principles employed when first built, integrity of workmanship remains strong.

⁵ Per *National Register Bulletin 20, Nominating Historic Vessels and Shipwrecks to the National Register of Historic Places* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1985), p. 8: Decades of use in an often inhospitable environment necessitates periodic replacement of portions of some of the wooden components. Not unlike land-based resources that also require replacement of original fabric over time, the sheer nature of the environment to which boats and vessels are exposed ultimately results in similar replacement, only at an accelerated pace. Changes to a boat to continue operation historically or restoratively, and that are done with materials similar in composition, design, color, texture, and workmanship retain the historic character of the structure and do not affect the boat's integrity. Integrity continues through the retention of hull form, rig, use of materials, and craftsmanship.

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Glossary Terms

Beam: The beam of a ship is its width at the widest point as measured at the ship's nominal waterline.

Bollard: A bollard is a post on a vessel used for mooring.

Bulkhead: A dividing wall or barrier between compartments in a ship.

Carling: Carlings run port to starboard and provide the structural support for the deck.

Carvel: Carvel built or carvel planking is a method of boat building where hull planks are fastened edge to edge, gaining support from the frame and forming a smooth surface.

Ceiling: A term applied to the planking or covering with which the inside of a vessel is sheathed.

Companionway: a set of steps leading from a ship's deck down to a cabin or lower deck.

Deadwood: Wood that serves primarily as filler between other structural members. A common place to find deadwood is between the keel and the upper keel or rabbet.

Deck: A deck is a permanent covering over a compartment or a hull of a vessel.

Deckhead: Sometimes called the overhead, the deckhead is the underside of the deck.

Deck Beams: Deck beams run forward to aft and provide the structural support for the deck.

Deck posts: Deck posts are the primary support for the deck structure.

Garboard plank: The lowest plank on a boat. Attaches to the bottom board, stems and ribs.

Helm: The steering apparatus of a ship.

Mooring: A mooring is any permanent structure to which a vessel may be secured.

Rail and Stile: Also called frame and panel, is a woodworking technique often used in the making of doors, wainscoting, and other decorative features that captures a 'floating' panel within a sturdy frame. This allows for seasonal movement due to varying levels of humidity.

Raked Stem: The stem is the most forward part of a vessel's bow and is an extension of the keel itself. When the stem inclined at an angle to the waterline, it is "raked."

Sole: The floor of the cabin or deck

Superstructure: The superstructure is the structure built on top of the hull.

Tumblehome: The tumblehome is the narrowing of a ship's hull with greater distance above the water-line.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Criterion A: Transportation
Criterion A: Entertainment/Recreation
Criterion C: Architecture (Naval Architecture)

Period of Significance

1930-1945

Significant Dates

1930

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

John William Swanson

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The *DeSmet* is eligible for listing in the National Register under criteria A and C. Under Criterion A, the boat is eligible for its role it played, and continues to play, in the development of recreation within Glacier National Park. Even prior to its establishment as a National Park in 1910, boating occurred in the park area, both as a means of travel and also for recreation and sightseeing. The boating concession represented one leg in the development of the nascent recreational infrastructure of the park, serving as another means of luring tourists to the area. As an early representative of the first park-wide boating concession and its importance to the success of the concession and tourism within the park, the *DeSmet* is eligible under Criterion A. The *DeSmet* is also eligible under Criterion C as an excellent example of a carvel planked boat constructed using traditional boat-working techniques and materials by J. W. Swanson, an early influential boat builder both in and outside the park.⁶ The history of boats in Glacier is inextricably entwined with Swanson. Swanson's *DeSmet* retains a majority of its original components and serves as an excellent representation of the boats that historically plied the waters of Glacier National Park. The few Swanson boats that remain in the park are significant, rare examples of a type of boat once common on American waterways from Florida's Silver Springs to the Wisconsin Dells.⁷

The *DeSmet* meets the Registration Requirements set forth in the Amended Glacier National Park MPS under the context for "Development of Recreation (Concession) Infrastructure in Glacier National Park (amended)—J.W. Swanson and the Development of Boat Concession Operations" and the "Historic Boats of Glacier National Park" property type. The Period of Significance conforms to the MPS cover context period.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

A Brief History of the Glacier National Park Boating Concession

For a detailed discussion about the boats and boating concessions at Glacier National Park, please refer to *Glacier National Park Multiple Property Listing, Amended (2016)*. The use of boats in Glacier National Park occurred even before the actual establishment of the park. Prior

⁶ Traditional techniques were employed both during the original construction of the boat and during its subsequent restoration. "Traditional" denotes the use hand planes and chisels as well as a steam box. Even though these vessels were constructed nearly a century ago, some power-driven saws would have been used similar to today.

⁷ The historic significance of the boats to the Park was noted in a December 15, 1988 memorandum from National Park Service Maritime Historian Foster to the Chief Historian of the National Park Service. The memorandum indicated preparation of a Multiple Property Submission for the boats for listing in the National Register was a sound pursuit: memorandum on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT.

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to the turn of the twentieth century, rowboats ferried visitors across the Flathead River and a larger steam powered wooden boat transported passengers from Apgar to the upper lake facilities; the steam launch was soon replaced by three gas-powered launches. It wasn't long until the realization that the utility of boats extended beyond transportation to recreation, such as sightseeing and fishing.

As the role of the Great Northern within the park expanded to include serving as the primary concessionaire under the moniker Glacier Park Hotel Company, opportunities arose for the operation of boat-related businesses to serve not only transport-related functions (to places such as the newly constructed chalets), but also recreation-related activities. Although the Great Northern operated two launches on St. Mary Lake dedicated to transport between St. Mary Chalet and Going-to-the-Sun Chalet, with a third providing a recreational function, boating-related opportunities continued to exist within the park for those with the vision and skills to harness the potential.

In 1911, Frank Kelly and Orville Denny secured a boating concession to transport visitors from the stages at Apgar to the various lodgings at the head of Lake McDonald. The same year the two contracted with John William (J. W.) Swanson, a boat builder for the growing freight traffic along Flathead Lake. Kelly and Denny commissioned Swanson to construct the launch, *Ethel*, signaling Swanson's initial incursion into the boating business in Glacier. Four years later, in 1915, Kelly and John Lewis contracted out the *Lewtana* from Swanson. Swanson brought the boat from Flathead Lake, a monumental feat itself for the time, and added 10 feet to its length once it arrived at Lake McDonald.⁸

As Swanson's reputation continued to grow, the Glacier Park Hotel Company hired him in the late 1910s to operate and maintain the *St. Mary*, a 100-passenger launch, and the smaller 20-passenger *Glacier*. In addition, Swanson was contracted to construct another boat for use of visitor transport and cruises on St. Mary Lake.⁹

After three seasons working with the Glacier Park Hotel Company and its St. Mary Lake launches, Swanson set about developing his own boat concession on the lakes on the east side of the park. He wrote to Superintendent Walter W. Payne on November 4, 1919 with his prospectus: "It is my desire to maintain row boats for hire on Two Medicine Lake, St. Mary Lake, and McDermott (Swiftcurrent) Lake, as well as launches on Two Medicine Lake, during the coming season and a launch on Lake McDermott when facilities there permit."¹⁰ A one-year contract was approved with the result that Swanson began operating his own boat concession in the summer of 1920. The same year, Swanson instituted launch service on Two Medicine Lake;

⁸ This story is told by many sources, but Swanson gives a first person telling in the article by Phyllis Clark, "Cap'n Swanson—Boat Builder," *The Daily Inter Lake*, July 19, 1970.

⁹ Multiple letters detail the business partnership between Swanson and the Glacier Park Hotel Co. Most notable are correspondence concerning the construction the launch, *Little Chief*, in 1926. "H. A. Noble, General Manager, Glacier Park Hotel Co. to R.R. Vincent, Asst. Superintendent," March 15, 1926, Series "Concessions," 900-02 Contracts and Permits, Unit 007, Glacier Park Hotel Company, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT.

¹⁰ J. W. Swanson to W.W. Payne, Nov. 4, 1919. Series "Concessions," 900-02 Contracts and Permits, Unit 006, Folder 4, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT.

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facilities associated with this operation included two boathouses and a pier.¹¹ While Swanson operated boats under his own concession between 1920 and 1938, two other concessionaires, Glacier Park Hotel Company and the Glacier Park Transport Company, also used boats he constructed.

It was during this period that Swanson embarked on a prolific period of boat-building launching seven boats over the next decade. Three of the boats, the *Wymufus*, the *Josephine*, and the *Grinnell*, all featured a white oak stem and frames, keel of deadwood fir, and planking made from local cedar.¹² The former served for pleasure and fishing cruises while the latter two served as visitor transport; none of these boats remain. According to Superintendent J.R. Eakin's Annual Report in 1921, the new vessel, *Wymufus*, at Two Medicine Lake "provided popular pleasure and fishing cruise trips to park visitors."¹³

The year 1926 witnessed the construction and launch on two of Glacier's east side lakes of two new 45-foot, 50-passenger vessels; the *Rising Wolf* on Two Medicine Lake and the *Little Chief* on St. Mary Lake.¹⁴ The following year, the Glacier Park Hotel Company commissioned Swanson to build the *International* for use on Waterton Lake in Waterton Lake Provincial Park, north of the border.

The Glacier Transport Company, a transportation concession started in 1914, assumed the launches at Lake McDonald in 1929, and soon commissioned Swanson to construct one vessel to replace the entire aging fleet. The scuttling of the *Lewtana* in 1929, along with the rest of the Lake McDonald fleet, marked a change in how boats were used. Sightseeing becoming the number one priority as the automobile and the construction of roads in the park took their toll on the boat's usefulness and practicality to ferry visitors from one spot to another. In 1930, Swanson launched the *DeSmet* for the Glacier Transport Company on Lake McDonald; the *DeSmet* was used for scenic boat cruises with interpretive commentary; a role it continues to serve to this day. Three years later, he launched the 60-passenger, cedar plank on oak frame, *Chief Two Guns* to replace the *Grinnell* on Swiftcurrent Lake.¹⁵

By 1938, and wishing to end his tenure in the park, Swanson sold his boats and the NPS concession contract to Arthur Burch and Carl Anderson.¹⁶ With their purchase, the local

¹¹ Holterman, Jack, "Boats in Glacier" (unpublished document, no date), GNPA, Ruhle Library, West Glacier, MT.

¹² J. W. Swanson, "Specification of 36 Foot Boats for Glacier National Park," Series "Concessions," 900-02 Contracts and Permits, Unit 006, Folder 4, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT.

¹³ J.R. Eakin, "Superintendent's Report 1921," Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921.

¹⁴ Department of the Interior. Transportation Permit, Jan. 1, 1926-Dec. 31, 1926. Series "Concessions," 900-02 Contracts and Permits, Unit 006, Folder 4, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT; Superintendent Kraebel to D. R. Hull, January 12, 1927. Series "Concessions," 901-02 Permits, Glacier Park Hotel Company Launches, Unit 020, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT. Applying for approval of "a new boathouse for the auxiliary launch Little Chief acquired last summer...".

¹⁵ Letter from Superintendent E. T. Scoyen to Director NPS, Nov. 2, 1934. Series "Concessions," 900-05 Correspondence, Unit 011, Folder 4, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT.

¹⁶ J. W. Swanson to E. T. Scoyen, April 9, 1938. Series "Concessions," 900-05 Correspondence, Unit 011, Folder 4, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT.

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businessmen from Kalispell planned to operate the business in the same manner as Swanson. The price of \$25,000 included the NPS concession contract, the associated boats, boathouses and other equipment. Swanson assisted the two through the first summer in 1938.¹⁷ The business, whose name changed to the Glacier Park Boat Company, has been owned and operated by the same family since that time.

Swanson returned to Glacier at the end of World War II, at which time he and Burch constructed *Big Chief*, a 45-foot cedar plank and oak frame vessel.¹⁸ With the completion of the *Big Chief* in 1945, the *Chief Two Guns* relocated to Josephine Lake and the *Big Chief* assumed responsibilities on Swiftcurrent Lake until 1961 when it too moved to Josephine Lake, rechristened *Morning Eagle*.

Early in 1941, financial issues arose for the Glacier Park Hotel Company. The expense associated with maintaining its St. Mary fleet and the completion of the new bus system that operated on the Going to the Sun Road resulted in surrendering their preference rights for the launch service on St. Mary Lake in favor of Burch and Anderson.¹⁹ By the end of World War II, Arthur J. Burch assumed full ownership of the Glacier Park Boat Company. Soon after, the *Little Chief* was purchased from the Glacier Park Hotel Company, moved to Two Medicine Lake to replace the *Wymufus*, and renamed, *Sinopah*.²⁰

In 1953, Burch acquired the physical assets used with the launch service on Lake McDonald from the Glacier Park Transport Company, assuming control of the boat concession for the entire park.²¹ In 1988, Art Burch Jr., Scott Burch, and Mark VanArtsdale and their wives assumed the concession contract for the Glacier Park Boat Company continuing the scenic boat tours and rental service Arthur Burch provided.

The DeSmet

The 1920s witnessed a tourist bonanza in the park as thousands of wealthy Americans from the East Coast made Glacier National Park their summer playground. Boats and horses provided access for the extensive system of backcountry chalets and campgrounds; the addition of new, larger capacity boats to this important tourist and transportation cog yielded improved service for these early tourists.

¹⁷ J. W. Swanson to Dept. of Interior, June 7, 1938. Series "Concessions," 900-05 Correspondence, Unit 011, Folder 4, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT.

¹⁸ Interviews with Arthur J. Burch's grandsons and current owners of the Glacier Park Boat Company, Art Burch, Jr. and Scott Burch. Fall 2014. Columbia Falls, MT.

¹⁹ A. A. Aszmann to D. S. Libbey, March 6, 1941. Series "Concessions," 900-05 Correspondence, Glacier Park Hotel Company, Unit 015, Folder 3, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT.

²⁰ Much of the Glacier National Park archival papers between the 1950s-1970s were lost. Interviews with Arthur J. Burch's grandsons, Arthur and Scott Burch helped fill in these gaps about how and why the Little Chief and Rising Wolf were moved and renamed.

²¹ Hillory A. Tolson, Regional Director to Howard H. Hays, June 4, 1953. Series "Concessions," 900-02 Contracts and Permits, Glacier Park Hotel Company, Unit 007, Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT.

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By the end of the 1920s, the construction of the Going to the Sun Road through the park provided an easy route for visitors to reach the Lewis Hotel (Lake McDonald Lodge) at the head of the lake. With an eye toward reducing its aging fleet, the Glacier Transport Company commissioned J.W. Swanson to construct a new vessel for Lake McDonald that would replace their other launches and primarily be used for scenic cruises rather than transportation. Swanson completed the 56-ft. passenger launch, *DeSmet*, at his shop in Kalispell in a mere six weeks, and transported it by truck to the park for the 1930 season.²² He also constructed a custom boathouse for the *DeSmet* in the current Fish Creek Campground on the north shore of the lake; the boathouse contained a boat cradle on rails for dry-docking during the winter season. This boathouse continues to function in its original capacity housing the boat each winter.

The Glacier Transport Company operated the *DeSmet* until 1953 when the boat and rental concession on Lake McDonald was sold to Arthur M. Burch (son of Glacier Park Boat Company owner, Arthur J. Burch) and Raymond Simpson who operated under the company name, Lake McDonald Boat Company. They gained concession rights to boat tours at St. Mary Lake in 1957. Burch took sole ownership of the company and its assets including the *DeSmet* in 1958. In 1967, Arthur M. Burch took over Arthur J. Burch's boats and concession contract at Two Medicine Lake and Many Glacier making the Glacier Park Boat Company the sole, park-wide boating concession.²³ He retired in 1987 and his two sons, Art Jr. and Scott and their cousin Mark VanArtsdale took over the business. Scott Burch remains the sole owner and operator of the concession and its boats. The *DeSmet* has never left Glacier National Park since its launch in 1930.

Over the years, repairs have mostly followed traditional methods and the overall design has not been changed. The boat still maintains a large amount of original materials in both the hull and superstructure. New steam bent oak frames have either replaced or been "sistered" to those too deteriorated to serve inside the hull, and new fir has been used to replace rotten areas of the original fir stem and keel. Areas of the hull require new cedar planks on a regular basis due to the persistence of rot associated with annual swelling and drying of the wood planks. All new planks are of locally sourced cedar and follow the same lines as the original layout. As old planks are replaced, the original galvanized fasteners are replaced with modern silica bronze fasteners that prevent wood deterioration and rot.²⁴ The continued maintenance of the boats, while time-consuming and expensive, results from the life-long relationship between the Burch family and the boats of Glacier National Park. The decades-old relationship has instilled in the family an understanding of the importance of the boats to the history of the Park.²⁵

Today, passengers purchase tickets from a small kiosk on the shoreline below the Lake McDonald Lodge and board the boat from the adjacent floating dock. Cruises last an hour and

²² Ibid.

²³ "Historical Interview with Arthur M. Burch and Mrs. Billy Ann Burch," June 5, 2001. Private Collection kept at Glacier National Park Archives, West Glacier, MT. Accessed with permission of Scott Burch, November 2015.

²⁴ Per *National Register Bulletin 20, Nominating Historic Vessels and Shipwrecks to the National Register of Historic Places*, 1985, p. 8:

²⁵ Kennedy, Brian, "Little Chief tour boat returns to St. Mary Lake," *Hungry Horse News*, July 12, 1990.

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provide passengers with an informative commentary focusing on the history, geology, and ecology of the area. The operating season runs from late May into September after which the *DeSmet* is dry-docked in the Fish Creek Boat House. The boat never leaves the park and all repairs are done during the time before and after each operating season.

As with the other four remaining J.W. Swanson boats, the *DeSmet* serves as a direct link to the early days of Glacier National Park. Built in 1930, the *DeSmet* provides a nearly identical experience to visitors of the park today as it did when constructed. In a sense, the *DeSmet* serves as a time machine transporting visitors back to when the fledgling boat concession provided a unique and different view of the park, a view from the water to the land. The boat continues to function as an important part of the park's tourism. It provides a glimpse of 1930s boating in one of the most beautiful settings in the world and serves as a tribute to J. W. Swanson, its builder, and the subsequent owners, the Burch family, who acknowledged the historic importance of the boat through its diligent restoration.

John W. Swanson

Born in Troy, Pennsylvania in 1883, John Swanson moved to Seattle, Washington in 1898. At the age of 13, Swanson built his first boat, the *Flyer*, in 1907. Swanson followed this up with the construction of the twin-screw, steam logging tug, *Westly Wells* in 1908.²⁶ His love of the Glacier National Park area began the same year during a visit to the foot of Lake McDonald where he noted "that there was no spot more beautiful in the entire state."²⁷ Prior to moving his operations to the Glacier area, he operated his own company, the Flathead Boat Construction and Transportation Company. He earned a strong reputation as a master boat builder catering to the growing freight traffic that ran up and down Flathead Lake. At least 11 documented boats constructed by Swanson plied the waters of Flathead Lake. Most were steamers used for hauling machinery and timber. None remain.

Though Swanson's boats ranged up to 350 feet in size, he also made much smaller boats, including rowboats, barges, and scows. The barges he constructed that operated on Flathead Lake were used for a variety of purposes including hauling livestock, lumber, and concrete. In addition to the boats Swanson built for his own use, he constructed several boats on contract for use on Flathead Lake, including two 65-foot vessels for the Somers Lumber Company.²⁸

Several stories exist regarding the determination and resourcefulness of Swanson. One story describes the move of one of his large Flathead Lake boats, the *City of Polson*, to Lake McDonald in 1915. Swanson undertook a two-week journey with the assistance of a six-man crew to maneuver the boat via the Flathead River and McDonald Creek. The extremely difficult move entailed a roughly 60-mile trip transporting the boat over rapids and sand bars.²⁹ The

²⁶ White, Thain. "A Brief History of the Steamboating on Flathead Lake in Western Montana, and Roster of Flathead Lake Steamers Etc. 1883-1957." Thain White Papers. Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana.

²⁷ Phyllis Clark, "Cap'n Swanson—Boat Builder," *The Daily Inter Lake*, July 19, 1970.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ This story is told by many sources, but Swanson gives a first person telling in the article, "Cap'n Swanson—Boat Builder," *The Daily Inter Lake*, July 19, 1970.

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ability to complete such a difficult venture demonstrates J. W. Swanson's doggedness and ingenuity. Upon the boat's arrival, he dry-docked it then added ten feet to its length. Rechristening the boat the *Lewtana*, he contracted it out to Frank Kelly and John Lewis.

By 1920, Swanson acquired his own concession in the park, the Glacier Park Boat Company. He operated the company until he sold to Arthur Burch and Carl Anderson in 1938. Not content to solely focus on his boat concession, he purchased, in 1928, 2800 acres of land near Eureka, west of Glacier National Park, and branched out into logging. To make his planned logging operation viable, a bridge was needed to allow the transport of the logs. Showing his craftsmanship extended beyond the construction of boats, he built a 750-foot bridge, which he boasted "...supported 35 to 40 tons, plus the truck weight, and it lasted for 20 years in high water and low."³⁰

After his sale of the Glacier National Park concession and boats to Burch and Anderson, Swanson's maritime skills resulted in his employment during World War II as a shipyard supervisor on Terminal Island in Los Angeles Harbor. During his time in California, he continued his boat building activities with the construction of yachts and yacht tenders.³¹

The sale of the concession and boats didn't mark the end of Swanson's activities in Glacier National Park. Near the end of World War II, Swanson returned and assisted Burch with the construction of the 45-foot cedar plank and oak frame vessel, *Big Chief*.³²

During the latter part of his life, Captain Swanson split his time between Somers, Montana, in the summer and California in the winter. His wife, Emma, an ardent supporter of his boat building profession, passed away in 1964. Captain Swanson passed away at the age of 88 in November, 1971.³³ His importance to the boating history of Glacier National Park is reflected in the words of Phyllis Clark: "Fascinating is the word to describe Cap'n Swanson. Cap'n Swanson has carved his niche in Montana history and will be long remembered...long after the *DeSmet* and *Rising Wolf* make their last excursion trips in Glacier National Park."³⁴

³⁰ Clark, 1970.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Interviews with Arthur J. Burch's grandsons and current owners of the Glacier Park Boat Company, Art Burch, Jr. and Scott Burch. Fall 2014. Columbia Falls, MT.

³³ "The Daily Inter Lake", November 18, 1971, Kalispell, Montana.

³⁴ Clark, 1970.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Mires, Calvin. "Plying the Waters in America's Little Switzerland: The Role of Turn of the Century Lake Tourism in Glacier National Park." Master's Thesis, East Carolina University, 2005.

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Building Maintenance Files. Glacier National Park.

Series "Concessions," 900. Glacier National Park Historical Records and Central Files. Glacier National Park Archives. West Glacier, MT. (Formerly the Ruhle Library, as mentioned in the footnotes of the original document).

Glacier National Park Collection, Technical Information Center, Denver, Colorado.

Thain White Collection. Archives and Special Collections. Mansfield Library. University of Montana. Missoula, MT.

Interviews

Burch, Arthur and Scott. (grandsons and current owners of the Glacier Park Boat Company). Interview by James Hackethorn, Fall 2014. Columbia Falls, MT.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 48.551425 N | Longitude: -113.980872 W |
| *Fish Creek Boathouse | |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

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Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

- | | | |
|-------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Zone: 12 | Easting: 280032.5 | Northing: 5381882.5 |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

As an active vessel, all that area contained within the extreme length and breadth of the vessel, specifically 45 feet in length by 12 feet in width.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes the entire area of the vessel as she floats at her berth. As a movable resource the ship continues to ply the lake. Although the boat is docked during the winter months in the NR-listed Fish Creek Bay Boathouse (represented by the latitude and longitude coordinates called out above), the boundary was selected to encompass the vessel alone.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: James Cannon Hackethorn
organization: Glacier Park Boat Company
street & number: 282 Sunrise Creek Loop
city or town: Columbia Falls state: MT zip code: 59912
e-mail james@glacierparkboats.com
telephone: (406)-207-2661
date:

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property:

City or Vicinity:

County:

State:

Photographer:

Date Photographed:

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of ____.

See Continuation Sheets

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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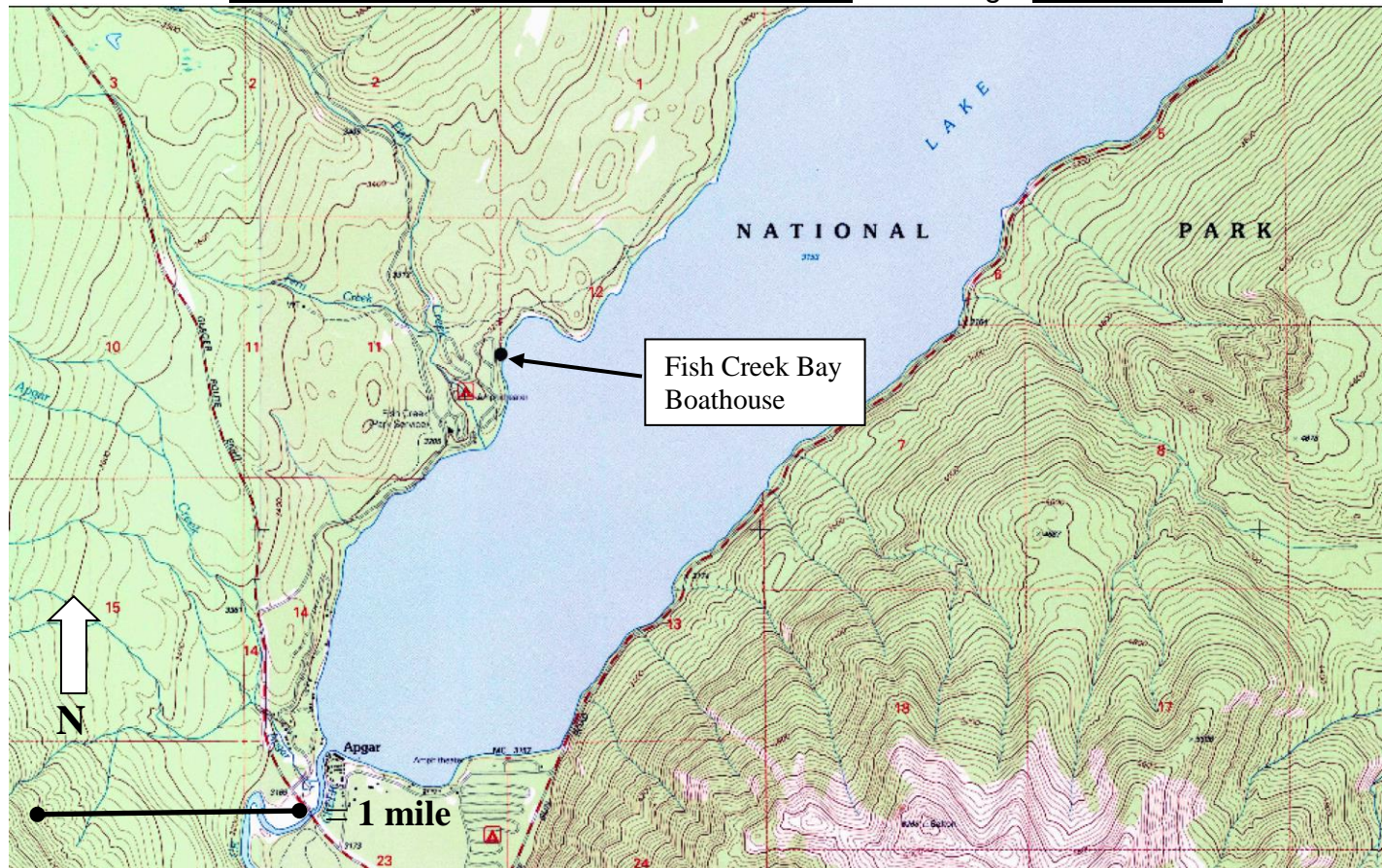
Glacier National Park Multiple Property

Listing, Amended (2016)

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation--Maps

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Montana State Library - Digital Library
(406) 444-5354 | geoinfo@mt.gov | <http://msl.mt.gov>

Map created using the Digital Atlas June 22, 2017
<http://msl.mt.gov/GIS/Atlas>

Location of *DeSmet* docking during winter months at Fish Creek Bay Boathouse, Lake MacDonald. Found on the Lake McDonald West 7.5' Quadrangle map.

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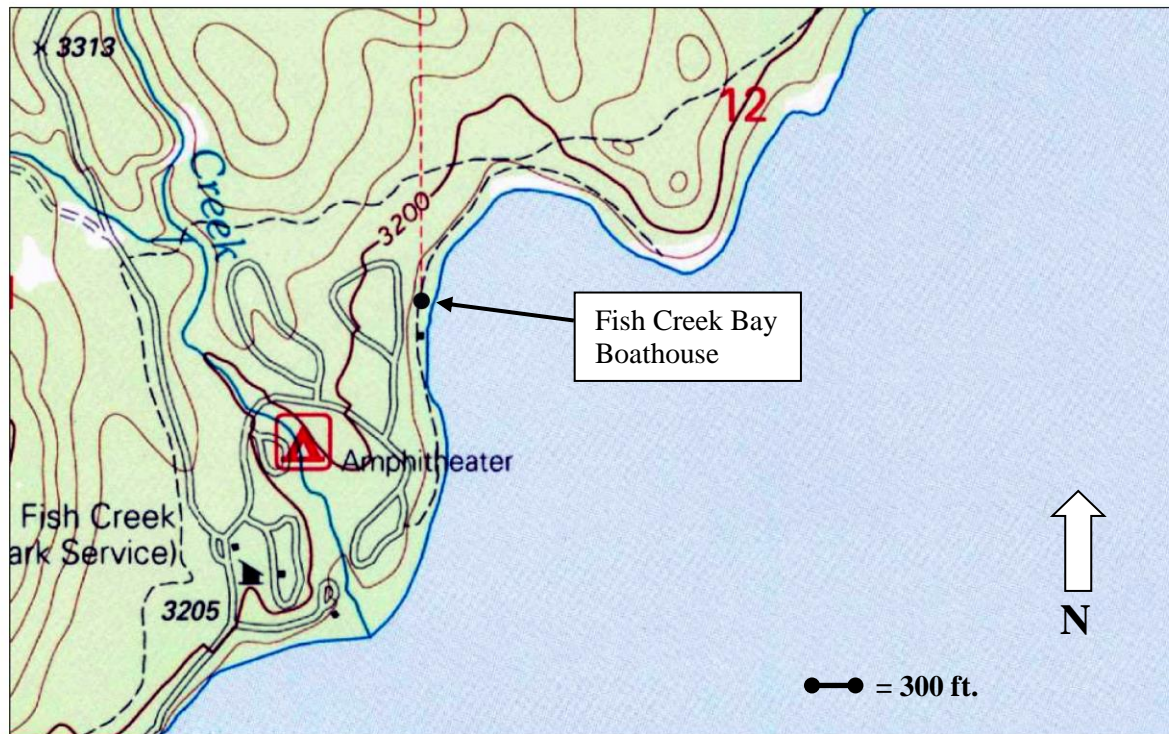
Glacier National Park Multiple Property

Listing, Amended (2016)

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation--Maps

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Map created using the Digital Atlas June 22, 2017
<http://msl.mt.gov/GIS/Atlas>

Montana State Library - Digital Library
(406) 444-5354 | geoinfo@mt.gov | <http://msl.mt.gov>

Close-up of *DeSmet* docking during winter months at Fish Creek Bay Boathouse, Lake MacDonald. Found on the Lake McDonald West 7.5' Quadrangle map.

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Montana State Library - Digital Library
(406) 444-5354 | geoinfo@mt.gov | <http://msl.mt.gov>

Map created using the Digital Atlas June 22, 2017
<http://msl.mt.gov/GIS/Atlas>

Aerial close-up of *DeSmet* docking during winter months at Fish Creek Bay Boathouse, Lake MacDonald.

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JW Swanson preparing to launch DeSmet 1930 Glacier National Park Archives.

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DeSmet, circa 1930. Photo courtesy of Scott and Barbara Burch family collection.

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Name of Property: DeSmet

City or Vicinity: Glacier National Park

County: Flathead

State: MT

Photographer: J.P. Bell

Date Photographed: 2016

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: Desmet Bow Port.

MT_FlatheadCounty_DeSmet_0001

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Name of Property: DeSmet

City or Vicinity: Glacier National Park

County: Flathead

State: MT

Photographer: James Hackethorn

Date Photographed: 2016

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: DeSmet Bow Deck Seating.

MT_FlatheadCounty_ DeSmet_0002

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Section number Additional Documentation—National Register Photographs Page 29



Name of Property: DeSmet

City or Vicinity: Glacier National Park

County: Flathead

State: MT

Photographer: James Hackethorn

Date Photographed: 2016

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: DeSmet Lower Stern Deck.

MT_FlatheadCounty_DeSmet_0003

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Name of Property: DeSmet

City or Vicinity: Glacier National Park

County: Flathead

State: MT

Photographer: James Hackethorn

Date Photographed: 2016

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: DeSmet Engine Room Hull Frames.

MT_FlatheadCounty_DeSmet_0004

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Section number Additional Documentation—National Register Photographs Page 31



Name of Property: DeSmet

City or Vicinity: Glacier National Park

County: Flathead

State: MT

Photographer: James Hackethorn

Date Photographed: 2016

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: DeSmet inside wheelhouse.

MT_FlatheadCounty_DeSmet_0005

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Name of Property: DeSmet

City or Vicinity: Glacier National Park

County: Flathead

State: MT

Photographer: James Hackethorn

Date Photographed: 2016

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: DeSmet lower stern deck seating.

MT_FlatheadCounty_DeSmet_0006

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Section number Additional Documentation—National Register Photographs Page 33



Name of Property: DeSmet

City or Vicinity: Glacier National Park

County: Flathead

State: MT

Photographer: James Hackethorn

Date Photographed: 2016

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera: DeSmet cabin bench detail.

MT_FlatheadCounty_DeSmet_0007